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ABSTRACT

This paper describes public library services to deaf and hard of hearing persons in Denmark. Topics covered include: (1) target groups, including deaf, deafened, hard of hearing persons, professionals and relatives who have contact with the hearing impaired, and other groups using visual communication; (2) means of communication, including sign language, Sign Danish, Danish with supporting signs, signs to spoken language, spoken language, reading lips, and mouth hand system; (3) the collection, including teaching videos, videos with stories told in sign language, feature films with subtitles, CD-ROMs, picture books with sign illustrations, fiction with hearing impaired characters, nonfiction, periodicals, language stimulating materials (e.g., games), and pamphlets; and (4) the job of the librarian, including external relations, material selection, working with users, and collaboration. (Contains 11 references.) (MES)

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Current trends in developing a contemporary public library service to deaf and hard of hearing persons in Denmark

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Abstract

The Purpose of the public libraries in Denmark is to increase information, education and cultural experiences by making books and other suitable materials available without charge. This should be valid for all groups in society. For instance, in Denmark we have a rather long tradition of services for blind people. For hearing impaired people there have not been any special services until our library started to look in to the matter back in 1990.

Paper

The Purpose of the public libraries in Denmark is to increase information, education and cultural experiences by making books and other suitable materials available without charge. This should be valid for all groups in society. For instance, in Denmark we have a rather long tradition of services for blind people. For hearing impaired people there have not been any special services until our library started to look in to the matter back in 1990. In Copenhagen we have 20 branch libraries. Our library is placed in an area with approximately 34,000 inhabitants. It is close to the church for the deaf and to the deaf club and deaf activity center in Copenhagen. For some years a number

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of deaf people have been rehoused in the area. Although we have had some deaf people coming to the library, it was our impression that many never came near the place. Obviously because we did not have the suitable materials. We examined if anything was done in other cities in Denmark or in the Nordic countries. We soon realized that almost nothing was done in the library sector to meet any special needs of hearing impaired people.

With money from a fund that supports new fields in library work, we established a project with the title: Improving the possibilities for the deaf and hard of hearing population to use the services of a public library. Since the start there has been a deaf, deafened or hard of hearing trained librarian employed at the library. In the planning phase and during the 1½ years of the project we had a group of consultants consisting of a psychologist and former headmaster of the school for the deaf, a priest for the deaf, a professor from the University of Copenhagen working with the education of audiologists and finally a children's librarian, himself a father of a hard of hearing child. During this period the staff at the library started a mini course in visual communication and signs to support the Danish spoken language and some elementary hearing tactics. After 1½ years the project period ended, luckily as a success. The services for hearing impaired people became a permanent part of our work with its own part of the budget. As librarians have changed over the years, the Deaf and hard of hearing collection, as we call it, has evolved in purpose and scope as well. The following will be a description of target groups, communication means, materials, different functions and a little about the future.

Target groups

- Hearing impaired
- Professionals/ relatives
- For instance "Signs to spoken language"- users and bilingual children

Ad.1.
Hearing impaired - who are they?
There are about 500,000 hearing impaired in Denmark, that is about 10% of the population in Denmark. Hearing impaired cover the terms deaf, deafened and hard of hearing, which will be explained in the following:

Deaf

Deaf are people born without any hearing or with so little hearing that it does not have an independent function. Deaf might also have lost their hearing so early in life, that they couldn't assimilate the spoken language in a natural way. The mother tongue of the deaf is sign language, Danish or any other spoken language is their foreign language. This means that a big group of the deaf have linguistic problems with the Danish language and are weak readers. It is very important that the deaf child learns sign language first, as this will strengthen the possibilities of the child to communicate with the surrounding world later on.

Deafened

Deafened are people who are born with normal hearing, but later on they loose their hearing so it no longer has an independent function. As the hearing is lost after the person has passed trough a normal development of the spoken language this will often be kept. To get an optimal communication the deafened often use MHS - Mouth hand system and/or the spoken language supported by

signs.

Hard of hearing

The group of hard of hearing is the biggest group of hearing impaired. A hearing aid can help and maybe eliminate the handicap. The development of the spoken language is not always dependent on the hearing loss, so the development of the spoken language varies a lot and is individual. The group is often helped by using a loop, which intensifies the sounds through the use of hearing aids that, at the same time, shut out background noise.

Ad. 2.
The professionals/relatives are using the Deaf- and Hard of hearing collection as much as the hearing impaired themselves. We have about 500,000 hearing impaired in Denmark and there must be at least as many who in their daily life have contact with the hearing impaired. This could be families who find out that their child is hearing impaired, and they will need teaching materials. It could be at work, where they need some knowledge about hearing tactics teaching them how to communicate with the hearing impaired person. It could also be students wanting to write a dissertation, paper or the like.

Ad. 3.
There are other handicap groups where the handicapped person does not have any hearing problems, but somehow has problems with the spoken language making visual communication necessary. Our language stimulating materials in the Deaf- and Hard of hearing collection can also be very useful for the bilingual children.

Means of communication

Total communication is a notion which started in the 1960´es and in practice the whole idea is to meet another culture and use the same way of communication and tools which is the most suitable in the given situation. This means using the tools you have at your disposal to understand and to be understood. It could be:

Sign language

The language of the deaf is a completely visual/manual language that is developed and used by and among the deaf. Sign language speaks to the sight. The symbols of the language are signs and the grammar is independent of the Danish language, this means that sign language is an independent language. The grammar of sign language is making use of mime, body language and gesture all necessary elements in performing the language. Sign language is not international as many people think, but is different from country to country as the spoken language. Sign language also has many dialects and sociolects depending on those using it.

"Sign Danish"

The combination of spoken language and sign language following the grammar of sign language is often used when hearing and deaf are communicating with each other, and this is called "Sign Danish". The use of "Sign Danish" is a compromise made as the communication of most hearing will be based on the spoken language, and the deaf need signs to communicate.

"Danish with supporting signs"

When we have a combination of the spoken language and sign language where no consideration to the grammar of sign language is taken we talk about "Danish with supporting signs". To understand this it is assumed that you have a big knowledge to the Danish language, and this method is what the most hearing are able to use.

"Signs to spoken language"

"Signs to spoken language" are signs taken from the sign language, this can relieve the daily communication between each party. Characteristic of "signs to spoken language" is that it is only the most important words in the spoken sentence which will be accompanied by signs. This communication method is used by many speech handicapped as for instance mentally retarded. It is important to underline that "signs to spoken language" is not the same as sign language. The purpose of communicating with "signs to spoken language" is to develop the spoken language.

The spoken language

To make sure that the hearing impaired child acquires the spoken language it must learn to know and control all the sounds of speech. In the education of the deaf we call this discipline articulation. The learning takes place by the means of the senses of sight and touch. This is very time consuming and a hard process for the hearing impaired. If you are deaf the benefit in many cases will be small and you probably won' t understand the speech of the deaf.

Reading lips

The hearing impaired learns to lip-read through watching the articulation of another person, which is often necessary to understand the spoken language. If the movements of the lips were visible and different it would be easy to read, but this is not the case. Specially not in the Danish language, where most sounds are formed in the back of mouth and in the throat and are invisible, consequently you can't read them on the lips. Only 30% can be identified by lip-reading without any problems.

Mouth hand system - MHS

The Mouth hand system is a visual tool used by for instance deafened. The system helps the lip-reading with 15 different hand positions. The positions shows the sounds which can be confused or are invisible. Deaf use it as an element in sign language stating for instance place names, personal names and Danish words of which there are no signs.

In public libraries in Denmark you cannot expect the staff at the library knows total communication. The hearing impaired people live all around the country and generally do not use the local libraries, or to put it in another way they are not asking the staff for help. Knowledge about ordinary hearing tactics should be taken for granted, specially when we are talking about public accessible libraries, as the libraries in Denmark are. Materials

The Deaf- and Hard of hearing collection consists of:

- Teaching videos - sign language, Mouth hand system and "Signs to spoken

language".

- Videos with stories told in sign language.
- Videos produced by Døvefilm Video made for children, young people and adults.
- Feature pictures with subtitles - both videos and DVD. Some of these are with easy reading subtitles.
- CD' ROM's with dictionaries, teaching materials, stories told in sign language and general information's about the hearing impaired.
- Point- and picture books with sign illustrations.
- Fiction for children, young people and adults where a hearing impaired enter into the story.
- Non fiction about the entire group of hearing impaired - you will also see books about tinnitus, menière, noise control and things like that.
- Periodicals.
- Language stimulating materials - games for instance.
- Folders, pamphlets and leaflets from the organizations.

Earlier there was also a collection of:

- Easy reading books
- Ordinary point- and picture books

Easy reading books was chosen as a relevant material, as many deaf people are weak readers, but I found that this material applied to a bigger target group. These books are not included in the Deaf- and Hard of hearing collection and can be found another place in the library. Ordinary point- and picture books will often be suitable for deaf children, as they are visual, but it is difficult to find the books with sign illustrations among these. Therefore they are also not included in the Deaf- and Hard of hearing collection anymore, and they will now be found in the children's section of the library. Functions

At the Library at Ørnevej we have different events approximately once a month. Everybody is welcome - both hearing and hearing impaired. At events we provide an sign language interpreter and we have a loop. If needed we are offering other kinds of interpretation for instance in writing. Generally the choice of cultural events for hearing impaired is limited, and we think that it is important that we have something we can offer.

We have had some events for deaf preschool children. We have invited a deaf storyteller to tell the children stories in sign language. Some of them traveled a long way to Ørnevej and for many of them - both children and Kindergarten teachers - it was the first time visiting our Deaf- and hard of hearing collection. At the same time they had the possibility to borrow our books, and they can deliver the books at their local library which will bring the material back to us.

We have also had an event one Saturday afternoon where we invited deaf parents with children and parents with deaf children. Many parents with deaf children are feeling insecure with regard to their handicapped child and need to see that deaf children are normal children with a future as everybody else. Meeting other parents in the same situation is also of great value to most of them.

Visits to the library

The students from the school for interpreters are invited to visit the Deaf- and Hard of hearing collection. In their 3.5 year long education they have to write

some papers, where they need materials about the hearing impaired in general. They don't have their own library at school, which is why they come to see us.

Deaf adults who are attending a day school, and deaf children from the schools for the deaf are invited to visit the library to hear about our services not only in the Deaf- and hard of hearing collection but the library in general.

The job of the librarian

External relations

Much of the time is used on external relations, as it is very important to be oriented about what is going on in Denmark for hearing impaired. Periodicals and newsletters from the different organizations in Denmark, but also from Norway and Sweden, are very informative. On the Internet you can get to know what's going on in other countries.

Selection of the materials

Usually I'm informed about new materials in the newsletters, periodicals or at the homepages. If they have already been catalogued and registered in the Danish national base I order the materials in ordinary way. Every material we buy is estimated as relevant to the target group. We try to buy any material in Danish, while materials of foreign character - English, Swedish, Norwegian - are bought if this has actual interest or on demand. There is no actual quality estimation of the materials, as there is a comparatively small amount of materials in this area. We also buy materials which are normally not found in a public library, as they are at another level. This could be papers, reports, dissertations etc. This is materials in "the grey zone" from universities, colleges of education and other institutions.

Users/borrowers

Besides the ordinary service at the library it often happens that there is a special need in the Deaf - and hard of hearing collection. Parents of deaf children come to ask me what my parents did, when they found out that I was hard of hearing, what kind of school they have chosen, and how my childhood among the hearing has been, how I managed in school and many other things. Questions about sign language, the culture of deaf etc. in general are also typical and I take time to tell them about my opinion.

Collaborators

In Odense they have tried to establish a service for hearing impaired similar to ours. Here they also had a hearing impaired librarian, who was managing the collection in the 9 month project period. The project was described as a success, but the municipality wouldn't grant the needed money to make the offer permanent. The Deaf - and Hard of hearing collection still exists, but without a qualified expert. In Aalborg they are working on establishing a Deaf- and Hard of hearing collection at the moment, but they do not have a hearing impaired librarian employed, but in return the staff is eager to learn sign language.

Both places have a school for deaf children, different places of education have students who are hearing impaired and organizations and clubs for hearing impaired. We have had a few meetings, and we at Ørnevej have promised to consult them. It works, but the most optimum situation would be to have a

librarian - hearing impaired or hearing - to manage the collection and serve the hearing impaired on their premises.

The Danish Parliament has just passed a new law on library activities which makes it possible to place the responsibility for different activities in various libraries, where the superstructures earlier was concentrated in county libraries. It is our hope and wish, that the superstructure for library services for hearing impaired will be placed in our library. Consequently we will provide more special materials to all libraries in Denmark and act as consultants for libraries regarding materials and target groups. We have already formulated some recommendations on accessibility for hearing impaired, which can be used in any library.

It is with great interest we have read The draft of '99 to Guidelines for Library services to Deaf People. We find that our services in many ways match the proposals in the draft. And we of course hope, that this will be of value, when the decision is taken on whether there will be a superstructure library for the services for hearing impaired, and chosen which library should hold this position. The legislation stipulates that in each municipality there must be a library, and we hope it will be natural to say: In each library there must be a collection of materials and a staff ready to meet the wishes and demands of the hearing impaired population.

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